

Elizabeth Street Common Ground

5th Anniversary

"I've been five years now... very dubious at the start. At the moment, I've got so much positivity in me. I'm achieving things I couldn't even dream about before."

— Tex, tenant



IT'S TIME TO END
HOMELESSNESS



Introduction

Five years ago, Elizabeth Street Common Ground opened its doors and became home to 65 Melburnians in desperate need of housing and support.

The 11-storey residential building was the first of its kind to be purpose-built in Melbourne, designed to house and support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community.

It marked the culmination of more than three years of planning, development, fundraising and building by HomeGround Services (now Launch Housing), Yarra Community Housing, the Victorian and Federal Governments, construction company Grocon and a committed group of private companies, philanthropists and community service organisations.

It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of the first five years of this ambitious supportive housing project: lives have been saved, and changed for the better.

Not only have the tenants been given an opportunity to live in a safe, secure, healthy and affordable home but their on-site access to medical and health professionals, inclusion in a thriving community, and a range of learning opportunities have restored confidence, health, and prospects for a brighter future.

Before Elizabeth Street Common Ground, tenants routinely endured the dangers of sleeping rough, frequent trips to hospital emergency departments, undiagnosed

and untreated health issues, police intervention and incarceration. For most, life was about day-to-day survival. Their lives were often characterised by chaos, addiction, eviction, uncertainty, family violence, abuse, isolation and despair.

Most have embraced the opportunity to get their lives on track, and while some have had to leave, many stay on and continue to contribute to their new community.

We'd like to thank our staff, supporters, tenants and all those who have made Elizabeth Street Common Ground a reality.

It's been challenging for us all, but we've learned important lessons about the Common Ground supportive housing model and how it works best in our city. It has proven to be a sustainable and successful model from which other innovative solutions can be developed.

We look forward to a bright future for Elizabeth Street Common Ground, and to developing further supportive housing opportunities so no Victorian is left without housing.

Neil Chatfield
Chair of the Board
Launch Housing
October 2015

Fast facts

Elizabeth Street Common Ground



Opened September 2010

Nº1

First supportive housing
of its kind in Melbourne

192

tenants over five years;
65 current tenants

21

months

Average length of stay for
all tenants (to June 2015)

33

months

Average length of stay
for current tenants

131

modern studio apartments
and 30 two-bedroom
apartments across 11 floors

6 ★

environmental rating

Based on
successful
US supportive
housing model,
Common Ground
(New York)

200+

referrals for the first intake
of tenants in 2010

Of the current 65 tenants as at September 2015

27-72

years
age range

66%

live with a combination
of mental illness and
substance use

91%

reported mental
health as a major issue

72%

reported substance
use as a major issue

Key components of Common Ground projects

Permanent housing for single people – offering self-contained, high quality accommodation

Safe housing – 24/7 controlled access to the building, with round-the-clock concierge and support staff

Affordable – with rents set at a maximum of 30% of income for tenants who have experienced homelessness

On-site support services – to help people settle into and maintain their housing

A social mix of tenants – to ensure a mixed, thriving community, 50% who have experienced homelessness and 50% low income earners

“I work at ESCG because I believe in the Common Ground model. It seems logical that a way to solve homelessness is to provide permanent housing and help people keep it. I love ESCG as I am working with colleagues who are passionate about their roles and dedicated to making the model work. I will be advocating for ‘Housing First’ models like this for the rest of my life.”

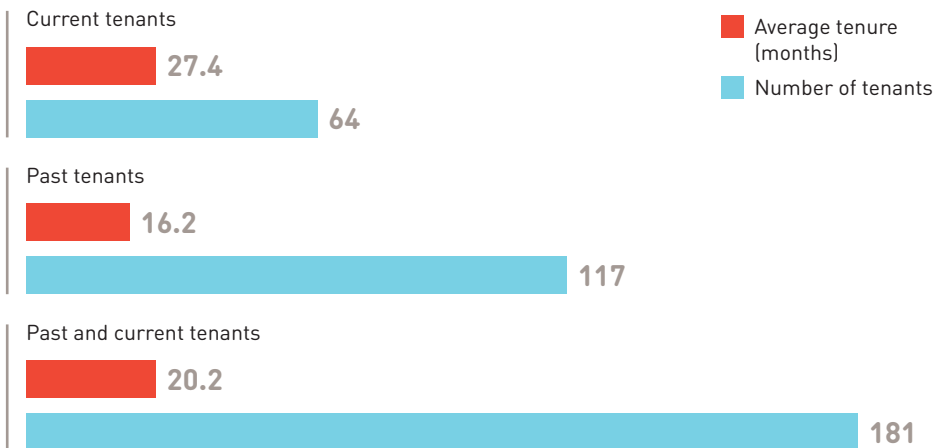
— Tim, Senior Support Worker

“I feel Elizabeth Street Common Ground is an incredible housing service that celebrates the health and happiness of each and every resident; where people are respected and welcomed, and diversity and individuality is rightly celebrated, irrespective of income or disability. It is also a place where people are offered an opportunity to access safe, affordable, good quality housing which they can hopefully make their home, and further pursue their ambitions and dreams.”

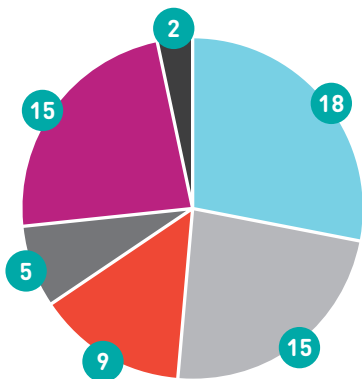
— Alistair, YCH Tenancy Services

Our statistics

Elizabeth Street Common Ground average stay



Current tenants – length of tenure



“Living at ESCG has changed my life. I no longer feel or am a burden on services or people. For me, Elizabeth Street Common Ground has been the only safe place I have ever lived, been cared about, supported, protected, guided and encouraged to start living and not just existing.”

— Doddy, tenant

“I love the unpredictably, uniqueness and personal satisfaction I receive every day, not only from the residents, but from my beautiful team.”

— Lisa, Senior Support Worker

Our history

“It’s a hundred percent better than being homeless, on the streets... I love it here.”

— Joe, tenant

Based on a successful US model, Elizabeth Street Common Ground (ESCG) was the first supportive housing project of its kind in Melbourne, and only the second in Australia.

It was the realisation of a vision shared by HomeGround Services (now Launch Housing) and Yarra Community Housing for a supportive housing project that would offer safe, affordable and permanent housing and services for people experiencing chronic homelessness and severe disadvantage.

For many years, HomeGround had seen an increasing number of these people cycling through the homelessness and health systems, without any hope of achieving the secure housing and supports they needed. Their only accommodation options were rooming houses, short-term motel stays, couch-surfing with friends and family, or sleeping rough.

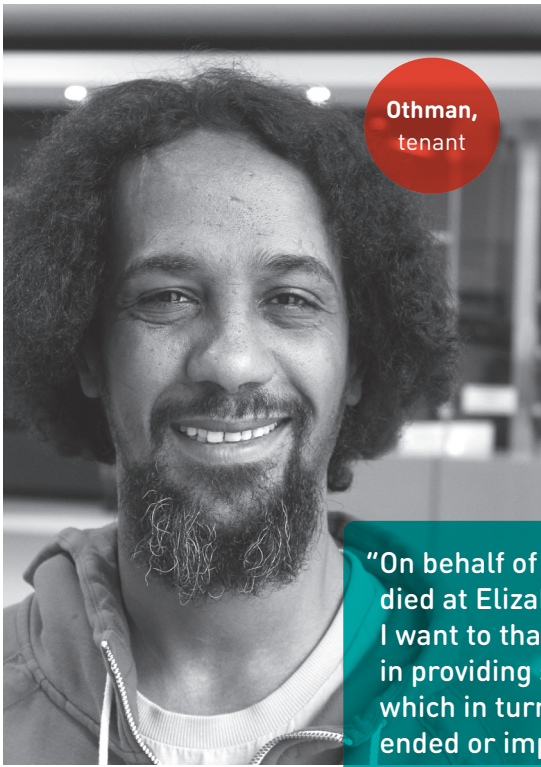
A broad partnership encompassing government departments, more than 50 private companies, leading philanthropists and a range of community services and organisations responded. They worked for more than three years to develop the concept, source funding, find an appropriate site, identify and invite potential tenants, and manage the myriad of details involved with building such an ambitious project from the ground up.

Key early supporters were the Victorian Government and construction company Grocon. Others quickly came on board including the Federal Government, Melbourne City Council, Rotary Club of Melbourne, the John T Reid Charitable Trust, the Collie Foundation, the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, Royal District Nursing Service Homeless Persons Program, Melbourne General Practice Network, Centre for Adult Education, Wesley Mission, Green Collect, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the University of NSW and a host of allied health practitioners.

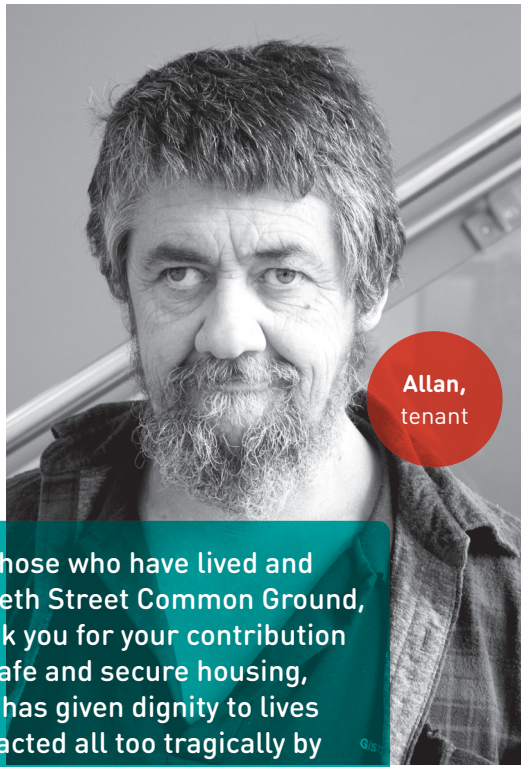
The project was announced in May 2008 and construction was completed in August 2010.

Elizabeth Street Common Ground opened on 6 September 2010 and by November that year, all 131 single studio apartments were tenanted.

Since then, similar developments have opened in Brisbane, Sydney, Hobart, Adelaide, Port Augusta and Canberra.



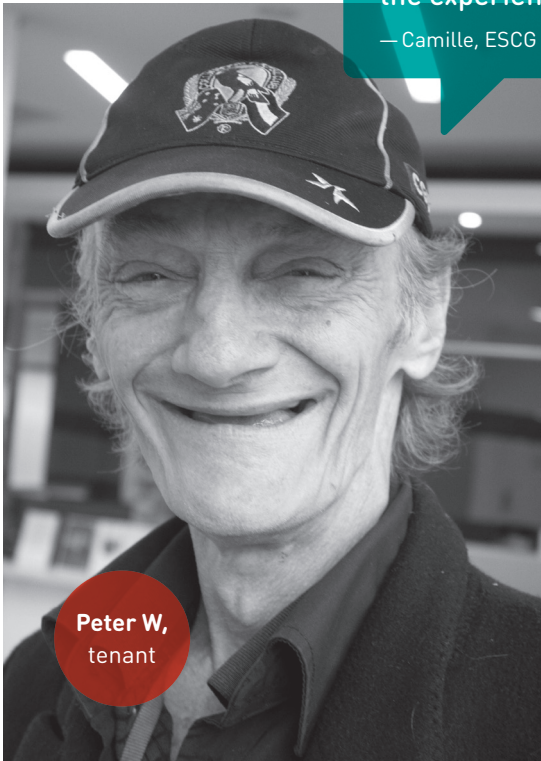
Othman,
tenant



Allan,
tenant

"On behalf of those who have lived and died at Elizabeth Street Common Ground, I want to thank you for your contribution in providing safe and secure housing, which in turn has given dignity to lives ended or impacted all too tragically by the experience of homelessness."

— Camille, ESCG Manager



Peter W,
tenant



Feven,
tenant

Highlights

“My experience since living at Common Ground is that I have ceased seeking help from the different housing services, transitional housing, emergency accommodation, domestic violence services, and churches. I no longer need to access services for material aid; food vans, soup kitchens, vouchers or counselling. The monetary cost of being reliant on these services must be huge – perhaps someone could work this out and see how effective Common Ground is.”

— Doddy, tenant

6

September 2010

first tenant moves in
(and remains here to
this day!)

6

November 2010

full occupancy completed
(65 tenants)



Ongoing dedication by
professional health and care
workers including a General
Practitioner, Royal District
Nursing Service nurse,
masseuse and Community
Care Aid



November 2010

Centre for Adult Education
(CAE) learning program
established onsite offering
foundation and pre-accredited
learning opportunities and
courses

45

tenants

SpecSavers pro bono
donation of eye testing and
provision of eyewear to
45 tenants

June

2011

Prime Minister
Kevin Rudd visits

“Being part of a healing and nurturing
team promoting positive change and self-
development is what keeps me here.”

— Yvette, Masseuse

Challenges and successes

The first 18 months of operation were particularly challenging, and a steep learning curve for everyone.

There were a number of critical incidents, including some evictions. Launch Housing and Yarra Community Housing staff worked closely during this period to develop a range of policies and procedures to ensure that the safety of tenants was maintained, and that problems were dealt with early so that evictions could be averted wherever possible.

We developed stricter visitor management policies, which had, and continue to have, a positive influence on the Elizabeth Street Common Ground community.

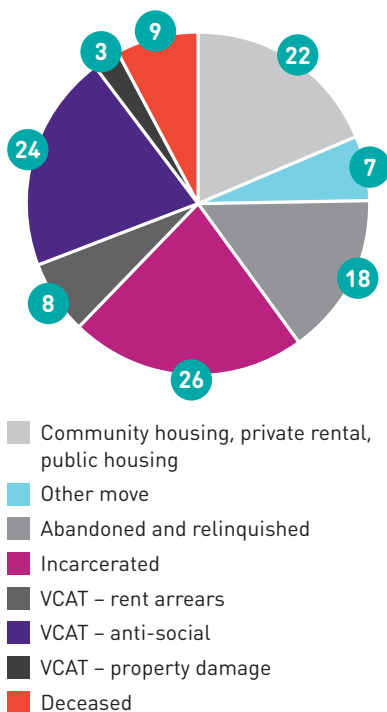
Over the years, a number of tenancies have ended as result of planned exit to more appropriate accommodation, re-incarceration, eviction for violence and/or anti-social behaviour or abandonment of their tenancy. There have also been nine deaths in the five years.

However, overall, moving into Elizabeth Street Common Ground has demonstrably improved tenants' lives, and shown that this type of support can form an important part of our approach towards ending homelessness.

“The personal highlight for me has been the story of a tenant who was so anxious and tearful during assessment that I thought he was going to walk out and never return. With support from our team, he didn't walk out. He stayed and made his home around him. Now, I can't imagine the place without him.”

—Greg, ESCG Coordinator

Reason for exit



The tenants

Many of our tenants say moving into Elizabeth Street Common Ground has been a life-changing experience.

Here's what they say

David,
tenant

"It's been really helpful and I'm really grateful. I don't know how to thank the staff (enough)."

—David, tenant

"It's unreal to tell you the truth. Peaceful and safe and relaxing."

—Eamonn, tenant


"Coming off the streets, having nowhere to live, finding it very hard to survive. Then coming across an establishment such as this, with community housing which houses people such as myself... it's giving us a new start in life."

—Stefan, tenant

Fiona,
tenant

"I've got my confidence back. My family life's improved, my social life's improved, everything's looking up."

—Robbie, tenant



"I'm very grateful... I've got a place to live here. Everybody's just so helpful."

—Chiew, tenant

Peter B,
tenant

"I've never had the confidence of having a place before. I never thought this was possible. A lot of people don't understand that the simple fact of being able to turn on the TV, pull the blinds down; that means everything. You've changed my world!"

—Damien, tenant

"We're treated fantastically and we're actually built back into a community."

—Adam, tenant



Kate,
tenant

"The staff here are really good. It's like having brothers and sisters, a Mum and Dad, it really is"

—Albert, tenant

The future

“It’s very important for me to convey that ESCG has been more than a housing solution for me; it’s been a truly dynamic and life changing experience. A life lived in transient and temporary accommodation is one of fear and terror. The level of commitment and compassion from the staff of ESCG has been fundamental in creating a culture that could be likened to that of a family. Not only was I presented with an amazing apartment and place to call my own – I have also been afforded the option to be embraced and held, or allowed to simply be.”

— Emma, tenant

Elizabeth Street Common Ground has shown that Common Ground supportive housing projects work, and work well in transforming the lives of tenants.

As well as improving their life outcomes, it lessens the burden on emergency services, prevents people from cycling endlessly through the homelessness, health and corrective services systems, and creates a unique opportunity for social inclusion and re-engagement with community.

Five years on, the supportive housing model is now a proven, practical and cost-effective way of responding to the housing and support needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Australia.

Launch Housing (formed by the merger of HomeGround Services and Hanover Welfare Services) is committed to expanding the opportunities for further Common Ground projects in Melbourne.

We see supportive housing, including Common Ground and our other project

such as Youth Foyers, as an integral part of ending homelessness in Victoria.

Our next project involves developing a Common Ground for families in Melbourne. Prompted by an ever-increasing demand for housing and support services for Melbourne mothers, the project will deliver a safe place for families to live and be supported.

As with Elizabeth Street Common Ground, this new project will target some of the most vulnerable women and children in our communities who have been affected by family violence, mental illness, substance issues and interaction with the criminal justice system.

For more information or to become involved, contact Launch Housing on (03) 9288 9600 or visit launchhousing.org.au



Goran,
tenant

"I truly love the people I work with, not only the residents, because they all inspire me. I find their life stories fascinating. It feels like a big extended family to me. I like to make people smile and I've learned so much from them, but especially about what gratitude is and how we should appreciate the little things in life."

— Iwona, Senior Support Worker

Thank you

We gratefully acknowledge the support and partnership of the following people and organisations, without whom Elizabeth Street Common Ground would not have been possible.

Partners (Build and Establishment)

Victorian Government	Claude Neon	AECOM
Yarra Community Housing	Deca Constructions	Bonacci
Grocon	Concrete Precast systems	CJ Arms
HomeGround Services	Dnf steels	Coffey
Big River	DEC	Davis Langdon
Caroma Dorf	HaymenEentire	ACGA (Australian Common Ground Alliance)
CSR	Freyssinet	Fulcrum
Boral	IJF	Golder Associates
CDL	Lockwood	Marshall Day
Expert Security	Marant Industries	Hassell
JOTUN	Melbourne Facades	Montluar
Mirabella	NAPOCA	Stoll Long Architecture
One Steel	Omnifloor	City of Melbourne
Signature	Richstone Group	Norman Disney and Young
DBF	Schindler	Webber and Associates
Schiavello	Stegbar	Vekta
Tradelink	Wastech	Vertigo
Arc Plastering	Watters	
Cemintel	Wormald	

Supporters (Past & Present Post Opening 2010)

City of Melbourne / Café
Meals / Project Green
.....

Melbourne City Baths
.....

Specsavers Melbourne
Central & Little Collins
.....

Melbourne North Police
.....

Inner West Area Mental
Health Service
.....

Inner North West
.....

Melbourne Medicare Local
.....

Centre for Adult Education
(CAE)
.....

ACSO / The Pantry
.....

Melbourne Primary Care
Network
.....

Brotherhood of St
Laurence
.....

AFL
.....

Royal Melbourne Show
.....

Melbourne Zoo
.....

Rotary Club of Melbourne
.....

Rotary Club of
Melbourne Park
.....

Wesley Mission
.....

Dr Sally Wilkins,
Psychiatrist
.....

Irene Matthews,
Psychologist
.....

Andrew Gritscher,
Acupuncturist
.....

North Yarra Community
Health
.....

North Richmond
Community Health
.....

Central City Community
Health
.....

Green Collect
.....

The Good Guys
.....

Bunnings
.....

Kmart
.....

Inner Space
.....

Inner Melbourne
Community Legal
.....

Better Life
Communications
.....

RDNS
.....

Sign For Work
.....

UnitingCare ReGen
.....

The Collie Foundation
.....

John T Reid Charitable
Trusts
.....

Helen Macpherson Smith
Trust
.....

Deb Burnett (Love Your
Home)
.....

Wear For Success
.....

Second Bite
.....

Hillsong
.....

State Trustees
.....

Justice Connect
.....

Victoria Legal Aid
.....

IKEA
.....

REA Group
.....

Citywatch Security
.....

ARC Films
.....

“There are so many vulnerable Victorians who call low amenity, unsafe and unregistered Rooming Houses home. They are given a key and left to live with no support, no community and very little hope. Elizabeth Street Common Ground is the opposite of this experience. Residents here are provided with a sense of safety, security, dignity and respect. This is a place where residents are valued, their journeys respected and their hopes and dreams are nourished so they can be exactly who they want to be. I am proud and grateful to be a part of peoples’ journey and am extremely excited to see what the future holds for these truly remarkable people.”

— Conor, YCH Tenancy Team Leader

Contact

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  [#endhomelessness](#)